

Arts Education in an Era of Accountability: Lessons Learned on the Front Lines of Change

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“The truth is one, the paths are many”
- Swami Satchidinanda

There’s a new sheriff in town!

September 1988

“Holy Mother of Mercy! We’re going to have to talk to one another!” exclaimed Dennis, a gruff but gentle veteran teacher. The chairs were arranged in a circle as the teachers entered the library for the first staff meeting of the year. I was surrounded by a veteran staff of traditional teachers. Change was not their forte. No one was amused.

“Good morning,” I said with youthful enthusiasm. “Welcome back. I promise that this will be an exciting year for you and the kids.”

Silence.

‘Move along, Plato, you’re losing them already’, I thought.

“Does anyone here remember the old radio programs?”

“You mean like, The Shadow?” asked Margo.

“Lamont Cranston. That was his real name.” added another teacher.

“I liked Fibber McGee and Molly.”

“And how about the feud between Jack Benny and Fred Allen?”

I allowed them to reminisce for awhile. They began to loosen up. At this point, I pulled a box out from behind my chair.

As I pushed the box to the center of the circle, I said, “This box is filled with the type of sound effect instruments they used on those programs.” They leaned forward. Over the next 15 minutes I pulled all manner of sound making devices out of the box. They reacted gleefully as each one was sounded. They reached out to hold and play the instruments. More memories were unleashed, like the time Fibber opened his closet and everything fell out.

“They did that with sound effects! Radio was so much better than TV. It forced you to use your imagination.”

Everyone nodded.

The time was right to move on.

“Does anyone know who Isaac Bashevis Singer was?” I asked. Catatonic stares. They looked at me with uncertainty. They looked at each other with uncertainty. Finally, one of the teachers, who happened to be Jewish, answered with pride in her voice.

“Isaac Bashevis Singer was a writer. He wrote about life in small Jewish villages in Russia called shtetles. He won the Nobel Prize for literature!”

“That’s right! I thought we would start today by reading a very short play based on one of his stories. The play is called *‘Herschel gets a Meal’*. It is only one page long.”

Uncertainty returned. This time it was joined by discomfort approaching panic. Finally, Dennis said, "Let's give the kid a break. I'll read a part." He then cajoled a couple of his cronies into joining him.

It only took a minute or two to read the play, and since the play is mildly funny, the experience was somewhat pleasant.

"Let's try it again. Only this time, let's do it in the style of an old radio play. Who would like to play a sound effect instrument?"

They fought like children.

"I want the one that makes the slapping sound!"

"I want the one that opens and closes the door."

Within minutes we had created a throwback masterpiece. The teachers laughed when a sound effect was late or someone dropped one. The iron was hot and once again, it was time to strike.

"Who do you think is the antagonist in this play?" This question elicited considerable debate. One camp thought Herschel was the antagonist. Another group was firmly behind the Innkeeper and his wife.

"The play is very short. Why don't we try it both ways and see which one feels better?" Herschel seemed to be gaining the edge.

Then one teacher playfully said, "I think the narrator is the antagonist!" So we played it that way to many laughs and much applause.

Dennis proclaimed, "I haven't laughed this hard at a faculty meeting in years."

That was my cue. I called the group to order.

"Was this fun?"

"Yes!"

"Did you learn about Isaac Bashevis Singer?"

They sounded a chorus of acknowledgement and appreciation for the gift of a new author.

"Was it fun to explore the protagonist - antagonist relationship?"

Once again, they issued a chorus of assent.

"Did you learn something new today?"

"Yes!"

"Do you think kids would have enjoyed this?" I asked.

"Oh yes, they love to act!"

"They love to move around."

"They would love those sound effects!"

"Great, because this is the way we are going to teach at this school from now on."

Stunned silence.

"Don't worry though. It will take time. I understand that. Those of you who feel comfortable with this concept will help others. If you are willing and able, everything will be fine. If you are willing but feel unable, I will help you. If you are unwilling, if you are diametrically opposed to this approach, you will need to think about your future, because Wolcott School may not be the place for you. This is a new beginning."

Two years after that first staff meeting of 1988, this group of traditional, senior teachers, who had not changed their teaching style in 20 years were honored by the State Department of Education and The Commission on the Arts as Connecticut's Exemplary School of the Arts.

January 2007

Almost 20 years have passed since that first faculty meeting and our passion to create the most thrilling arts integrated school continues. Our greatest achievement, however, has been the ability to maintain a strong, integrated arts program in the face of high stakes testing. Because of No Child Left Behind, Wolcott School and others like us are a vanishing breed. Connecticut adopted high stakes testing in 1987 and over the years, we have developed effective strategies that have helped us level the “arts and academics” playing field and maintain our focus on extensive arts integration. We hope this article will offer guidance to others who share the goal of arts integrated schools.

Five Lessons Learned on the Front Lines

We are career public school educators. As practicing professionals with many years of experience on the front lines of arts education, we offer the five lessons:

- **Use the arts to celebrate each child’s powerful voice**
- **Connect the arts and the academics**
- **Focus on leadership**
- **Adopt a culture based approach**
- **Build a sense of community**

These lessons have served us well and have proven to be effective in every school that we have mentored. Although we are an elementary school, we have worked with numerous secondary schools and the strategies involved remain the same.

1. Use the Arts to Celebrate Each Child’s Powerful Voice

We believe that every child has a powerful voice. We also believe that the arts are the perfect vehicle for giving life to those voices. Therefore, we use student writing as the basis for creating art, music, theater, and dance performances as well as video presentations. Through writing and the arts, students’ thoughts and feelings are elegantly framed and shared with a wide variety of audiences. **In this way, students develop a strong sense of ownership toward learning and the arts.**

For example, a student writes a poem or a song in the classroom. Her teacher recognizes that it has potential and refers her to the music teacher. Working with the music teacher, the student will write lyrics, develop a melody and over a long period of time compose, produce and record an original song (Karafelis & Hugh, 1995). We then present the recorded song as a World Premiere at our weekly assembly called Town Meeting. Often, one of our dance companies will choreograph a dance to the song and several months later the song will reappear at Town Meeting as a World Premiere Dance. Typically, those lyrics were created as part of a classroom writing assignment. **In this way, classroom teachers share ownership of the student voices and their artistic expression.**

Town Meeting is all about student voice. Therefore, it should be no surprise that an average of 200 parents attend Town Meeting each week and occasionally, 300 – 400 parents attend. At Town Meeting, parents, students and teachers watch as student writing is interpreted via all of the art forms. All presentations/performances are limited to five minutes. In this way, parents, teachers and students are able to experience a number of student voices presented in a variety of ways. Excellence is the standard for all performances/presentations. As you can see, parents attend Town Meeting because it is all about their children's voices. **In this way, parents share ownership of the school, student voices and artistic expression.**

Imagine a second grade student watching her song performed as a dance presented by fifth graders at a whole school assembly! Imagine being that child's parent or teacher. When we celebrate a child's voice, that child becomes empowered. In many cases, it is the first time a child learns she has a voice. Once children have submitted a piece of writing and personally experienced the power of voice, they become repeat contributors. Over time, their written expressions (voice) develop depth and elegance. They begin to have their own ideas about which art form(s) to use and exactly how they would like their voice expressed.

Every time a child's voice is celebrated, it promotes confidence based upon competence.

When a child is celebrated at Town Meeting, the parents and extended family attend. They arrive with video cameras and flowers. Parents of non-English speaking children or low income children may not come to the school often; however, they always show up when their child is celebrated. One Friday, a Hispanic boy was scheduled to read his poem to the school at Town Meeting. His entire extended family arrived at the school dressed to the nines. There must have been 20 people in their group. They were all so proud. Each of the teachers greeted the family and told them what a wonderful student he was. The family understood that we valued their child as much as they did.

When parents understand that we value their child, they begin to show up at other times too, e.g. parent conferences and school events. In addition to valuing their child, they understand that we also value their culture. How important does that make a child and a family feel? **By celebrating each child's powerful voice, we also celebrate the diversity of the student population in an authentic manner.**

By validating the child, we have built allegiance to our school and our arts integration model. The pre-school sibling who attends Town Meeting to see her older sister's world premiere song learns to love Wolcott School long before she begins Kindergarten. The grandparents, who are on fixed income and sometimes question school budgets, willingly advocate for our school and vote for funding. The parents are always thankful and tell us how much they appreciate our school. They are willing advocates. Equally important, they are vocal, voting advocates.

Teachers, parents, and kids love our school with a passion that is difficult to adequately express. During the summer, kids ride their bikes to the school and ask if they can walk around the building. I ask them why and they tell me they can't wait until school begins in September. It is because of the shared belief, indelibly etched on our office window, which states:

Over the years, we have developed a number of exceptional strategies for publishing student writing (voices) for a variety of audiences and settings. We are VERY good at this and we invite you to steal all of our ideas. Go to our website to see many examples of student voices. You may also listen to one of the 250 songs our students have written over the past 15 years:

www.wolcottelementary.com

“In this school, we believe in celebrating each child’s powerful voice.”

Those eleven words elegantly express our school mission. It is the goal to which teachers, parents and students have dedicated themselves day in and day out. Celebrating each child’s powerful voice is the glue that binds us all together.

2. Connect the Arts and the Academics

The public, many classroom teachers and administrators believe that the arts and academics are mutually exclusive. That is, if you are teaching the arts, you are taking time away from the academics. We ask the reader to accept that this perception exists and be ready to move forward with a plan.

We believe in art for art’s sake. The intent of this section of the article, however, is to build a case for connecting the arts and the academics. If we hope to maintain a strong role within the public schools, the arts community must develop more effective strategies for changing the perception of the arts and academics as mutually exclusive.

When we first adopted our school vision to celebrate each child’s powerful voice, the initial question was, “How do we get their voices?” The second question was, “How do we get classroom teachers to buy into the model?” We would need the support of classroom teachers if we had any hope of establishing an authentic, culture based, school-wide arts integration model.

We answered both questions with a single solution. Classroom teachers teach writing. It is one of their core curricular areas. It is assessed on the state mastery test. Writing is also an art form that students could use to express their voice. So, we set up a mailbox in the lobby. We called it The Magical Mailbox. We told teachers that we wanted their students to submit their best writing to The Magical Mailbox. We told students that we wanted to hear from them about the things that they were thinking or feeling.

We established standards for the writing that was submitted to the mailbox. We wanted their voice to be loud and clear in the writing. The writing had to reflect the student’s best effort and be well presented. Writing that was sloppy or incoherent would be returned. A student editorial board was established to evaluate the writing and determine the venue for publication, presentation or performance.

As students were celebrated, teachers began to assume ownership of the model. When a child’s voice was celebrated at Town Meeting, we made a conscious effort to also recognize that child’s classroom teacher. As a result, we now receive over 3,000 pieces of writing in the Magical Mailbox each year. The writing is submitted by all of our students at every grade level. Every written piece is published, performed, or presented before an audience.

Student writing is easily linked to all academic areas. Here are two pieces that are rooted in math concepts. We receive many pieces covering every genre and curriculum area; however, these two represent a clear connection between arts and academics. The first piece, *Radius* was presented as a dance through a technique we call performance poetry. The second piece, *Place Value on Trial* was submitted as a theater script. Please note that in each case the author had to have a clear understanding of the mathematical concept in order to write the piece.

Radius
By Tracey Prendergast, Grade 6

I am a radius, because I only show
One half of my real self.
The world influences me.
Sometimes I feel as if someone
Is dividing me up
Trying to make a new object out of me.

Place Value on Trial
By Michelle Lynch, Grade 3

Setting: A Courtroom. Sitting in the witness box is the number 1. It is being questioned by a mean, old lawyer.

Lawyer: State your name for the court please.
#1: I have many names.
Lawyer: What?
#1: I have many names.
Lawyer: What do you mean?
#1: Well, depending on where I am, my name changes. It all depends upon the place.
Lawyer: So what is your name here, right now?
#1: Well, right now I'm not in any place, so you can just call me 1.
Lawyer: What do you mean, you're not in any place?
#1: Well, I'm not. I'm in a courtroom. Not a place.
Lawyer: Well, what kind of place are you talking about?
#1: Any of them.
Lawyer: You're confusing me.
#1: You're confusing me!
Lawyer: Look, what other names do you have?
#1: Sometimes I'm ten. Sometimes I'm hundred. Sometimes I'm thousand.
Lawyer: That's all your names?
#1: No, I actually have an infinite number of names.
Lawyer: Infinite!?
#1: Yes, Infinite.
Judge: I give up!

Academic accountability is the name of the game in today's school climate. Linking the arts and the academics in a way that can help kids, parents and teachers witness the connection is critical.

Wolcott School is diverse. We have a 37% minority population and 28 different languages are spoken at our school. Over the past 11 years, our school has demonstrated that linking writing and the arts can have a profound impact on high stakes testing. When we began the Magical Mailbox writing initiative, only 11% of our students achieved mastery on the writing

portion of the Connecticut Mastery test (CMT). Over the years, we employed a wide variety of programs and techniques to improve our writing (Dicks, 2005). By 2004, the final year of our third generation test, we had raised mastery scores to 89% (Berger, 2005). The ability to demonstrate significant academic achievement in a wholly arts integrated school is the most important tool the arts community can use to garner enthusiastic support.

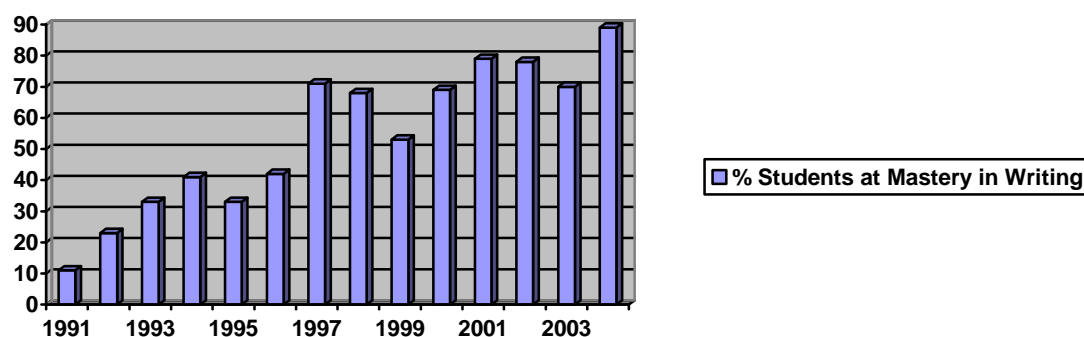


Chart 1. Percentage of Wolcott Elementary School students who achieved mastery in writing from 1991 through 2004, the final year of the third generation Connecticut Mastery test.

Results on the latest version of the Connecticut Mastery Test (2006) demonstrate that a high percentage of our students have achieved significant levels of proficiency across all academic areas (see chart 2).

Connecticut Mastery Test (2006)	Percent of students Scoring at proficiency
Grade 3 Reading	83%
Grade 3 Writing	95%
Grade 3 Math	87%
Grade 4 Reading	80%
Grade 4 Writing	91%
Grade 4 Math	84%
Grade 5 Reading	94%
Grade 5 Writing	95%
Grade 5 Math	95%

Chart 2. Percentage of Wolcott Elementary School students who achieved proficiency on the first administration of the fourth generation Connecticut Mastery Test.

Lesson 3: Focus on Leadership

Leadership is the great and powerful variable when it comes to the success of any organization. Schools are no exception. Poorly skilled leaders can destroy an effective school and highly skilled leaders can resurrect a failing school. There is a great deal of literature on the nature of leadership.

Peter Senge (2007) recently published an article in the Harvard Business Review that outlined the types of skills needed by today's most dynamic leaders. These are: sense making, relating, visioning and inventing. While reading Senge's article, these four traits stood out to us as critical prerequisites for effective leadership in today's schools. Unfortunately, we believe that the ability to raise test scores is the emergent prerequisite in the hiring process.

From a statistical perspective, a modestly talented leader can raise mastery test scores from 10% to 20%. On the other hand, it takes sense making, relating, visioning and inventing to raise scores from 20% mastery to 75% mastery and maintain them there. We need to keep our eyes on the leadership prize. In the end, modest leadership potential, short cuts and short term gains will be counter productive. Leaders who are capable of sense making, relating, visioning and inventing will get us where we need to go and keep us there. They will also help us avoid the trap of becoming a test driven school culture. In these schools, the arts and academics will be seen as integrated, not mutually exclusive. As practitioners, we thought we would add a few leadership traits to the list. Here is our unabashed list of leadership traits specific to the principalship.

You are no longer a teacher – Several years ago I had the good fortune to attend a seminar that changed my life. It was presented by The Breakthrough Coach (the-breakthrough-coach.com). The main point of the seminar was that principals, as former teachers, need to learn how to transition FROM a leader who applies teacher technology to leadership TO a leader who applies leadership technology to leadership. This required me to change my entire leadership mindset.

In a nutshell, The Breakthrough Coach taught me that my function was to walk around the school, listen to people, talk to people, shape our school vision and make decisions. Among other things, I needed to accept that paperwork was my enemy and that I would have to enlist the support of my secretary to assume that burden. I also recreated my office. I replaced the teacher desk with a real desk and purchased nice furniture. I removed the bulletin board that displayed schedules, data (much of which was out of date) and junk and replaced it with fine art prints by my favorite artists. My office became a place to converse and think rather than a place of paperwork. I began to spend the majority of my time outside the office. As a result, I find that I am better able to practice and apply Senge's four traits of effective leaders. The seminar was comprehensive and I cannot repeat all of the details in this space. Suffice it to say that a principal is not a teacher with an office.

Economics have little to do with school leadership – As everyone knows, the economics of arts education are particularly susceptible to money matters especially in tight budget times. It seems we are always struggling to maintain staffing, provide materials and/or fundraise for artist residencies, which we prefer to call 'artist/scholar residencies'. Too often, it is easy to place an idea on the back burner for lack of funding. We have worked in a variety of settings from rural to urban and in our experience, money has never factored into our thinking when it came to vision and innovation. See next two items:

Children's voices are offered free of charge. Every time a student drops their written 'voice' into the Magical Mailbox, we can't wait to celebrate it. As counterintuitive as it seems, money is rarely raised as an issue. There are two reasons for this – one logical and one metaphysical (just go with us on this one). First, celebrating children's voices through the arts is a building priority. It is a priority for the student, her parents, her teacher, her principal, the school and the community. As a result, the people and money resources can always be found. For example, we have worked out a great school/business partnership with the owner of the local

dance studio. The owner is looking for exposure to her potential client base. We are looking for dance instruction. So, she comes to our school every week and teaches dance. Everyone is happy and it doesn't cost a penny. Metaphysically, we have found that having pure intent when dealing with children aligns the universe and everything you need appears (once again, just go with us on this one).

Task Commitment separates the best from the rest – Throughout history, one character trait defines successful creative producers is task commitment (Renzulli, 1985). Thomas Edison provides a clear example of task commitment. He tested over 1,000 different filaments before he found the perfect alloy for the lightbulb. The importance of task commitment as a critical trait is well documented in research literature (Terman, 1959). As arts education leaders, we have to demonstrate the same level of task commitment. If there is no money, write a grant, knock on doors, find a way. When someone says, "We can't do that," Ask "How CAN we do that?"

Finally, longevity is valuable – Schools and school systems are particularly susceptible to the revolving door of leadership. The arts are valued by a building principal. She retires or gets promoted and the new principal is a 'back to basics' advocate - so much for the arts program. One alternative to revolving leadership is to support successful, established leaders and encourage them to stay on the job, which we address in a subsequent section of this article. Another, equally effective option is to build culture based arts programs (see next section).

4. Adopt a Culture Based Approach

Since we all went through 'site based planning' in the 1990's, every school has a mission statement. They are generic and contain phrases like, 'We believe that every child has the right to learn' and 'We believe that a school should be a safe place.' Mission statements are printed in school handbooks. They are displayed in the school lobby. In most cases, they suit an organizational purpose: this is what we stand for! Unfortunately, once the mission statement is created, printed, posted, and tattooed, it is largely ignored. This is because committees do not create culture. Good leaders create culture through 'bottom up' consensus.

Nearly everything we do at Wolcott School is the result of bottom up consensus. Our strategy of pursuing a culture based approach has been carefully planned and based upon theoretical work related to organizational culture. We particularly like the model offered by Cunningham and Gresso (1993). They define the elements of culture in the following way:

- Shared values and beliefs
- Norms and practices
- Customs and traditions
- Priests and priestesses
- Stories and myths
- Heroes and heroines
- Rites and rituals
- Symbols and dress
- Clans and tribes
- Legacy and saga

For the purposes of this discussion, a school's mission statement reflects 'shared values and beliefs'. The way to ensure that your mission statement jumps out of the school handbook or the off the lobby wall is to apply all of the other cultural elements in service to the shared values and beliefs.

For example, our mission statement is:

“In this school, we believe in celebrating each child's powerful voice.”

Town Meeting and Harambe, our Monday morning assembly, are *customs and traditions* at our school. We use them to tell our *stories*, display our *symbols* (every performing group has its own t-shirt), identify our *heroes and heroines* (anyone who is performing), and define our *legacy*. By using these cultural elements to celebrate your mission statement, you create an organization that reflects your true *shared values and beliefs*.

When the 'arts supportive' principal who created a culture based program leaves, the school will not change because a 'back to basics' principal has been hired. Change may occur over time. It will only occur, however, if the new leader is adept at managing school culture because it is difficult to change *traditions, customs, norms, legacy and shared values and beliefs* that have been celebrated.

5. Build a sense of community

We begin and end every week with a whole-school gathering. We do this to remind children, parents and teachers that we are all part of a larger learning community. These gatherings also provide us with opportunities to celebrate student voices to an audience.

On Monday morning, we gather for a ten minute assembly called 'Harambe', which means 'coming together as one' in Swahili. We use this opportunity to welcome everyone back to school after the weekend, celebrate children's voices and to set the tone for the week.

On Monday mornings, ten minutes before the bell rings, students enter the building. As they enter, they hear the sounds of 'Streetbeat' our twelve student drum ensemble. They are pounding out a driving rhythm. The rhythm says, 'Raise your energy level and bring it into harmony with everyone else.'

When the first bell rings, Streetbeat stops the drumming. The student council president welcomes everyone. We then introduce a student reader. She reads a piece of her writing to the whole school. As the principal, I challenge the children to give their best effort this week. Sometimes I am specific. For example, I might say, "Boys and girls, it is January. As you know, we will celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday this month. I challenge you to write about your dreams for your family, our community and our world. Make sure it is your best work and bring it to The Magical Mailbox. You can honor Martin Luther King's memory by sharing your voice this week". The president adjourns Harambe and students file out of the auditorium. Harambe lasts 5 – 10 minutes.

Every Friday afternoon, we gather once again for a 45 minute assembly called Town Meeting. This is the setting in which students will share their world premiere songs, world premiere dances, poetry, art, theater and video presentations.

For the entire month of January, the songs, poems, essays, and stories handed in to The Magical Mailbox will be celebrated at Harambe and Town Meeting. Because we suggested at Harambe that students write about their dreams for our world, all of the dances, songs, art, sign language, readings and video we present in January will be focused on Martin Luther King Jr. and will honor his legacy. It is a much more authentic celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideals than simply reading the "I Have a Dream" speech at an assembly, which we also endorse.

As previously mentioned, scores of parents attend Harambe and Town Meeting. They are first person witnesses to the power of a child's voice. Parents are transformed when they witness their child's voice being celebrated at school.

A community is a group of people who share the same beliefs, values and ideals. There are no limits to a school's potential when they are able to create and sustain a sense of community and ownership.

Cause for Concern: What our Schools Look Like on the Inside

The public may be unaware of the changes occurring inside their local schools because of No Child Left Behind. Pressure to generate higher test scores is increasing exponentially and teacher stress levels are counter productive. On the positive side, in schools with skilled leaders, teaching is changing. In many ways it is becoming more targeted and effective. On the other hand, in almost all schools, whether the leader is skilled or not, a number of highly questionable practices are taking place.

No Child Left Behind has forced many schools to abandon the concept of an enriching curriculum (Holcomb, 2007). Increasingly, schools are focusing on high stakes testing at the expense of the arts and other disciplines, including social studies and science. If Social Studies and Science are relegated to second citizen status in this era of 'instruction' based schools (Armstrong, 2006), you can imagine the relative status of the arts in our schools.

Many schools have adopted scripted Reading programs, where the teacher reads the lesson aloud, word for word, from a teacher manual (Success for All). Other schools have chosen to create data boards where student results on high stakes tests are posted for all to see. Teachers are held accountable if their non-English speaking and Special Education students do not achieve proficiency on the state mastery test. Last year, a child from Portugal arrived at our school on the day before the mastery test. He did not speak a word of English, yet he had to take portions of the mastery test. We watched from the hallway as he cried while trying to answer questions in a language he did not understand.

The legislation has flaws, the funding needs to catch up with the vision, and the pendulum is still swinging. Mastery testing will soon be expanded to include science and social studies. As those two subjects are pushed onto the front burner, how much energy and commitment will remain for the arts? In light of these developments, the arts education community should be asking the following questions:

- **What strategies will enable arts advocates to communicate the efficacy, relevance and importance of arts education in an accountability driven era?**
- **How can the arts re-capture a market share of the public education agenda?**

Four Strategies: Shaping the Future of Arts Education

Preface

We are career public school educators. We were around when *Coming to Our Senses* (Quinn & Hanks, 1977) was published. We helped implement the recommendations of The Getty Center's DBAE art curriculum (Alexander & Day, 1991). We participated in the creation and dissemination of the National Arts Standards. Each of these initiatives was important and critical. Today, however, we find ourselves on the threshold of an era that threatens the existence of arts education in the public schools.

The public has well-developed perceptions of the arts, artists and their role in society. Altering those perceptions as they relate to public education is necessary and will require time and well-developed strategies. We believe the arts community should agree to a set of strategies for the future of arts education, pool their resources, and commit to the plan for the next 20 years. Each arts organization - from the largest national organization, to the largest performance halls, down to the smallest local arts agency - can and should retain its autonomy and uniqueness. If we function as a multi-headed beast, however, independent of one another in mission and intent, we will struggle to maintain arts teachers in the schools, audiences in our halls, and credibility as a vibrant and critical strand in the tapestry of our culture and society. To that end, we offer the following strategies for your consideration.

- **Create and support a cadre of new leaders for the future**
- **Invest in an Arts Education Research Initiative**
- **Unify all National Arts Agencies/Organizations to Identify, Support and Celebrate New Paradigms of Arts Education**
- **Adopt the 'long view' and be ready to fill the Legislative vacuum when the timing is right**

We welcome your endorsements, constructive criticism, and most importantly, your voice. These are new and different times and they will require new and different solutions.

Strategy 1. Create and support a cadre of new leaders for the future

The arts community needs to build and fortify its constituency. One way to do that is to create a cadre of skilled, passionate and task committed school leaders; to support and promote those leaders as they move through their careers; to encourage those leaders to become involved in professional organizations; to count on those leaders to apply their shared values in helping to shape policy. Here is how it would play out in real life.

Samantha is an early career, regular classroom teacher who applies for a grant through the state arts commission. The project resulting from her grant is exceptional. Over the next few years, she is awarded further grant opportunities. At every turn, her work is evaluated by leaders in the arts and/or arts education community. She consistently displays excellence. As a classroom teacher, she is establishing credibility with teachers and parents. Credibility will be an essential asset as her career progresses into leadership roles.

Samantha's vision, skills, and commitment are apparent. Through a local university and in conjunction with the state arts agency, she is offered a fellowship to study leadership and arts integration and become a certified school administrator. Through the program she is able to network with other teachers who share her values and beliefs about arts integration. As part of their training, she and her cohort are encouraged to join organizations and serve on committees. Samantha earns additional incentives including media exposure and awards.

After completing her leadership and arts integration studies, Samantha pursues a principalship. Upon achieving this milestone, she is once again offered a menu of support. "What can we do to help you achieve your vision?" She is invited to attend summer workshops sponsored by The National Endowment for the Arts or The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. While in Washington, she is supported and encouraged to establish professional relationships with her state representatives and senators.

As a principal, Samantha establishes a model program of arts integration that is culture based and integrated with academics. She maintains communication with colleagues from her leadership and arts integration cohort. In some cases, these relationships turn into a network of partnership and collegial support. She is not alone.

With continued formal support from the local arts agencies, Samantha and her colleagues begin to emerge as leaders in state and/or national organizations. These might include The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), The National Association of Elementary/Secondary School Principals (NAESP/NASSP), and others.

For Samantha the journey may be complete as a building principal. She may choose to become a superintendent or join the state department of education. The choices would be hers. In the end, the arts community

will have established a network of leaders with vision, skill and commitment who will work together as advocates for an enriched school curriculum celebrating each child's powerful voice.

Strategy 2. Invest in an Arts Education Research Initiative

Earlier in this article, we shared our observation that the public views the arts and academics as mutually exclusive. That is, if you are teaching the arts, you are not teaching the academics and vice versa. As an arts community, we have developed a few pat responses.

“When students are learning music, they are really practicing math.”

“Studies have shown that students who listen to Mozart perform better when taking tests (Rauscher, Shaw and Ky, 1993).”

“Students who take arts classes in high school are enrolled in a higher number of AP courses than their peers who are not enrolled in art classes.”

While noble and perhaps even true, these arguments are not sufficiently convincing to a skeptical public in an era of accountability. We need to establish clear rationales, rooted in solid research and communicated with surgical precision in order to alter perceptions. This will take time and focused effort.

As a doctoral student at The University of Connecticut, my research focused on the direct link between instruction in the arts and academic achievement in reading (Karafelis, 1986). My research design was empirical. That is, I used experimental research design and quantitative analysis (statistics) to demonstrate that teaching reading via a theater arts approach was just as effective as teaching reading using a basal reader series.

My research was not perfect. First of all, I had great difficulty locating prior research in this field. Most research was qualitative. That is, it focused on what students thought and how students felt about school or the arts. Bottom line, prior research linking the arts and academic achievement was relatively non-existent. I was not building upon a research foundation. I was laying down one brick.

Secondly, there were variables that I could not control within my research design. For example, in my study, ‘teacher’ was a nested variable. That is, I could not adequately control for the effect different teachers brought to the treatment. Typically, what happens in these situations is that someone else comes along and conducts research with an improved design. Over time, the incremental result of many research studies builds a case for a specific model or approach. Eventually, there is enough convincing evidence to support a specific model or approach.

Doug Reeves (2007), the reigning, research-based expert in school achievement techniques, advocates the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum and laments the choice between arts and academics as a false dichotomy. Thanks to Reeves and organizations like Americans for the Arts, the situation has improved, however, a great deal more needs to be accomplished.

Finally, we need to ensure that our new breed of leaders (researchers and practitioners) develop programs and publish articles in high circulation, respected journals. These articles should be based upon solid research. The amount of research linking the arts to the academics is increasing; however, we are still falling short of the necessary critical mass to make a difference. There needs to be a unified mission to support focused research via the universities, government agencies, and private entities that can make a difference.

Strategy 3. A “United Nations” of National Arts Agencies to Identify, Support and Celebrate New Paradigms of Arts Education

We have significant personal experience in this area and our story is one of heroism, intrigue, success and redemption. Now that we have your attention, read on and benefit from our learning experience.

In 1994, Jane Alexander, the newly appointed Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts visited our school. She was invited to visit Wolcott School by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. She loved our school and offered to fund a five year grant to replicate our model. We call our model “Higher Order Thinking Schools” or HOT Schools.

During the early years of our project, we worked feverishly to replicate our model in urban, suburban and rural districts. We gained insight into the factors that lead to success, e.g. strong, knowledgeable, committed leadership. We also identified the factors that lead to failure, e.g. top down design and implementation.

By the end of the first five years, we had replicated our model in 24 Connecticut schools with varying degrees of success. We did become smarter. We were also tired. In addition to teaching full time, we were conducting in-service presentations all over the country, visiting schools, filming documentaries and developing materials. One of the attractive aspects of our model was the success we exhibited on academic assessments. Over a 12 year period, we raised mastery scores in writing from 11% to 89%.

We were exhausted, however, the recognition we received kept us going. We received numerous local, state and national awards. We were lauded by one and all. Thousands of teachers, parents and administrators visited our school. We continuously refined our model. We have continued to develop our model with great success. We have explored technology as an art form. We continue to offer in-service and replication services nationally.

As a united arts community, we need to identify and replicate the experience of Wolcott School. There are many awards programs to recognize outstanding schools. They are wonderful and positive and good, however, they fall short of what is needed.

During the 1990’s, the National Endowment for the Arts supported such a program (Fowler & McMullan, 1991). Once again, our national arts agencies should come together in a more strategic manner to highlight programs and follow up by building bridges between and among the people who run these programs. We need to create formal mechanisms for sharing, discussion, publication, research, public relations, praise, funding and active cooperation.

Strategy 4. Adopt the Long View and Be Ready to Fill the Legislative Vacuum When the Time is Right

Innovation is usually the result of careful planning and hard work. It is rarely the result of random mutation. For example, the NCLB laws of today grew out of carefully implemented initiatives crafted by the policymakers and business community in the 1980’s. At that time, there was a belief that public schools were not producing skilled students. Policymakers and the business community latched onto ‘A Nation at Risk’ as their clarion call. Through various state education enhancement acts, they negotiated with teacher associations and state departments to offer higher salaries in exchange for accountability testing. Accountability testing ushered in the era of standards for each academic discipline. The standards became the basis for all state

mastery tests, which laid the foundation for creation of No Child Left Behind. Little in this plan was accidental and it offers guidance for the path we should follow.

There is an ebb and flow to all organizations. Public education is no exception. We move back and forth between conservative and liberal, centralized and decentralized, well paid and poorly paid (OK, poorly paid most of the time!).

People often refer to this as the pendulum of change. Many of our colleagues, who are fed up with the high stakes testing of No Child Left Behind, say, “Don’t worry, the pendulum will swing back”. Although this is true, it will not occur randomly. Also, they might not be familiar with Hegel’s original postulation on the pendulum, otherwise known as “The Hegelian Dialectic.”

According to Hegel, the pendulum does swing to polar opposites, which he refers to as ‘theses’ and ‘antitheses’. What has been lost in modern translation is the fact that when the pendulum swings back, it is actually swinging back to a new convention, which Hegel refers to as ‘synthesis’. That is, a new place of thought that has arisen out of the previous theses and antitheses. As an arts community, we should be prepared for the opportunity of synthesis. Our timing will need to be impeccable, our resolve must be unified, and our plan must utilize the elements of theses and antitheses to create a viable synthesis for public consumption.

Sometime in the near future, there will be a time when the pendulum is at the bottom of its arc, prepared to swing toward a new place of thought. At precisely this point in time, there will be a political, social, and economic vacuum waiting to be filled with opportunity, hopefully, an opportunity resulting from the innovation and hard work of the arts community. It could be as early as 2013, when NCLB will have reached its legislated endgame. It might happen before or after that point in time.

We need to be proactive starting today. We have to place our strategies into motion so that when the time is right, when the pendulum creates a vacuum, our synthesis will capture the conventional wisdom to offer a new way of thinking.

We will need to be as forward thinking and unified as the policymakers and business community were in the 1980’s if we hope to have a powerful impact on the future of arts education in this country.

Arts Integration at Wolcott School: A Student Perspective

It’s a Friday afternoon at Wolcott School. Town Meeting is in full swing. Children are standing before an audience of 600 people, reading poetry, sharing their art work, and performing for their peers. Standing in the back of the auditorium is Michaela, a former Wolcott student who is now a senior in high school, preparing to leave for college. She’s been asked to attend Town Meeting today, but she’s not sure why. Her little sister, Keenan, is a 4th grader at Wolcott, so perhaps she thinks that Keenan is a Student of the Month and will be honored as such.

But Keenan has a surprise for her 6-foot tall sister today.

Near the end of Town Meeting, Keenan is called to the stage, and Michaela is asked to join her. A moment later Michaela learns that her little sister has written a song about her. The two sisters sit side by side as the music begins.

Before reading on, return to the wolcottelementary.com website. Click on the music slot in the Magical Mailbox and find Wolcott Songs, Volume 13. Take a moment and listen to Michaela's Song.

*She's six foot one; she's going off to college,
She's gonna have fun, she's getting lots of knowledge...
She's going away from me,
I'm going miss her terribly.*

The song comes to an end and big and little sister embrace. There isn't a dry eye in the house, including Michaela's. But the song doesn't come as a surprise for Michaela, because her sister has been writing them since she was in kindergarten.

"My first song was *Cuddles* (Wolcott Songs 9)," Keenan reports with pride. "I wrote it and sang it with my friend, Tori."

When asked why she began writing songs, Keenan's answer is as simple as her first song. "That's just the way Wolcott School is set up. Someone told me that I could write songs here, so I thought I'd give it a try. Mr. Hugh (Wolcott's vocal music teacher) and all the teachers are really supportive. So I wrote my first one in kindergarten and it was great. So then I was in first grade. My mom asked if I planned on writing another song, so I told her that I'd give it a try. And my first grade teacher helped me, just like my kindergarten teacher did. That song was *My Dolls*. And so I just kept writing after that. Every year."

Said Keenan's mother: "Keenan continued to write a song every year because Rob Hugh and the rest of the staff expected it from her. They wanted to hear her voice. 'Where's your song this year?' Rob would ask, and the next week Keenan would be in with a song."

Michaela's Song became one of the more popular Wolcott Songs in recent years and, as with all great art, it began taking on a life of its own. Keenan performed it during Wolcott School's annual talent show, and later that year it became a featured song in the school play. The following year, Wolcott's premiere dance troupe, Moving Arts, choreographed a dance number to the song and performed it at Town Meeting while Keenan accompanied them.

"It all began in kindergarten with *Cuddles*," Keenan recalls.

Keenan had large shoes to fill when she entered Wolcott School as a kindergartener. Her big sister, Michaela, had passed through the halls of Wolcott School several years earlier and had left her mark as a musician, writer, and leader in the school. Following her graduation from elementary school, Michaela went on to create West Hartford's Unified Theatre, a nationally recognized program that seeks to create theatrical productions featuring the talents of individuals with and without special needs. Michaela's Unified Theatre has been an enormous success and has received high accolades. Connecticut Congressman John Larson wrote that "Michaela demonstrates the highest level of compassion, dedication and achievement among the youth of today. As a young adult, she already understands the positive nature of community as she describes through her work in the program." Big shoes indeed.

For Keenan, what began with song writing soon became much more, as it does for most students at Wolcott. Success breeds success, and one opportunity opens the door to another.

“You can express yourself in so many ways,” Keenan says with excitement. “Writing songs was just one way. But I did lots of other stuff too. Everyone did. You get to find out who you want to be. And then you can be it. Everyone gets a chance to shine. To do their thing.”

Keenan’s classmates also found this to be true.

A young lady whose parents and teachers initially feared that she might be autistic suddenly thrived once immersed in the arts. Playing the French horn, falling in love with writing, and performing on stage numerous occasions allowed the student to emerge from her silence and finally blossom. Said her mother: “There she was, under the lights, eyes wide, verbally sparring with (a classmate). They brandished their fake swords and uttered the glorious words of Shakespeare. They were *acting* for goodness sakes, not just shouting at each other. They were infusing the words with meaning. The little one who stumbled through last year, asleep, had awakened.”

Later on in the year, the girl offered an explanation of her sudden change to her mother: “Hey Mom, I don’t think that lady said that I was autistic. I think she said that I was *artistic*.”

Sometimes the arts can work their magic in a child’s life almost instantly. Joe was a student who arrived at Wolcott School in 5th grade from an inner city school. Having lost his older brother to violence, Joe was struggling academically and disinterested in school. Just 6-months later, he was a changed student. Though still not at grade level, Joe is engaged in his school work and making remarkable progress. He is a member of the school’s choir, band, and Street Beat, a student drum corps that performs every Monday morning during the Harambe assembly. He also performs as a Spotlight Twin at Town Meeting each week, introducing the writers that will read their pieces. “I could never imagine myself talking in front of so many people, and I was so nervous at first. But now I love it.”

When asked to talk about his new school, he smiles. “This school is so different. There’s so much that I want to do. I love coming to school. I got to play in the band, and now I can write stories and I’m submitting them to the Magical Mailbox. In the beginning I couldn’t even write a sentence good. I want to be Writer of the Week someday. And now that I can spell better and write with better fluency, I might get picked.”

“I even hate snow days now,” he adds.

Like Joe, Keenan also began writing poetry and submitting as much as she could to the Magical Mailbox, and she found immediate success. She had opportunities to read her poetry at Town Meeting. Her work was published in the school’s seasonal Literary Magazine. She was named as Wolcott’s Writer of the Week. Two of her poems were turned into posters that were featured in the front windows of the school. Those posters are still hanging in her bedroom today. Says Mom: “She always had an opportunity to express herself. Even though she does not have as many opportunities now, she is incredibly confident whenever on stage because of her Wolcott experience. Most importantly, Keenan considered herself a poet and a writer coming out of Wolcott.”

But one of Keenan’s fondest memories comes not from being a poet, a writer, or a musician. It came from her opportunity to act.

“One of my best memories comes from third grade, because it was my first play, and Michaela helped us.” Keenan’s third grade teacher, a fan of Shakespeare, directs an annual Shakespearean production with his class. After spending the year studying Shakespeare and his work, the class produces a play of their choice using Shakespeare’s original but abbreviated text as a script. It’s a challenge for 8 and 9-year olds, but it’s one that they accept with enthusiasm. Keenan’s class performed *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with Keenan playing the role of

Helena, the “painted maypole” of the Shakespearean comedy. Anxious to return to her elementary school roots, Michaela served as the play’s assistant director. “I knew that Michaela would be leaving for college soon, so I loved spending time with her during the play.”

“I have to mention the theater piece,” Keenan’s mother says. “It was remarkable. The opportunities that those kids have are just remarkable.”

In 5th grade, Keenan became a member of the student council, eventually rising to the office of President of Wolcott School. “I learned a lot from being President. You can’t just change stuff overnight. There’s a lot of things involved.” Wolcott School’s student council has been in place since 1988, and throughout the years, it has played a key role in the decisions that take place in the school. Whenever a significant change is instituted at Wolcott, the proposal is first presented to the faculty, the PTO, and to the Student Council, and each group is given an opportunity to respond to the proposed change. “It’s great that kids can make decisions for the school,” Keenan says when reflecting back upon her time in office. “It makes it feel more like your school. Like you own some of it.”

Like her sister, Keenan left Wolcott School 3 years ago and has done great things ever since. She is a first string bassist for her middle school’s orchestra and sings in the school’s select choir. She has also begun taking electric bass lessons with an eye on the jazz band next year. “I think that the jazz band sounds like fun. So cool.”

When asked what was most important about her time at Wolcott School, Keenan’s answer demonstrates wisdom beyond her years.

“The most important stuff was the book stuff. The things I learned in class. Reading books, writing, and math. I’m glad I went to middle school with all that knowledge. It’s what you need to succeed. But it’s the other stuff, the songs and the poetry and the art and the play, that gives me a chance to use the stuff in my brain. To express myself. It’s the fun part. The real good part. The best part of Wolcott School.”

Conclusion

We began this article with a story about teachers and the process of change. It is our contention that change can be accomplished quickly and effectively by skilled leaders.

We presented the reader with a set of lessons learned in our school over the years as well as lessons learned through our work with many other schools. We welcome your insights and constructive feedback relative to our ideas. More importantly, we encourage you to join the fight against test driven school culture.

We offered a set of long term, global strategies for promoting the promise of a broad based, enriching school curriculum of the future. Teachers did not enter education to ‘teach to the test’. They entered education because they wanted to inspire students and challenge them to achieve excellence across the full breadth and depth of human endeavor.

We ended the article with the story of one child’s journey toward self actualization. Our careers would be complete based upon Keenan’s experience alone, but we keep finding Keenans! They are in every classroom of every school that we have ever visited. They just need a little help to find their true voice, and it is the profound responsibility of their teachers and parents to guide them to the right path.

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